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RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 3805
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 7179
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0139
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2061
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0817
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 TASHKENT 001744

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (P. SPRATLEN)

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: CONTINUED GOU INTERFERENCE AND HARASSMENT WITH
AMERICAN OFFICERS' TRAVEL AND CONTACT WORK

REF: A. A) TASHKENT 1700
 1B. B) TASHKENT 1681
 1C. C) TASHKENT 1677

Classified By: P/E Section Chief Ted Burkhalter; reasons 1.4 (b, d).

Summary

1. (C/NF) During the last two weeks of September, travel and contact work by U.S. officials has been hindered or disrupted by the GOU on multiple occasions. On September 21 (ref B), poloff,s visit to a Bukhara school was interrupted by a National Security Service officer and the director of the school ordered to the cotton fields. On October 5, Embassy received a diplomatic note complaining about this visit. On September 23, USAID personnel from the Almaty Regional Mission were questioned in Samarkand by local Ministry of Justice (MOJ) officials and their planned project site visit cancelled. On September 26, CAO and a visiting American citizen speaker encountered difficulties during their visit to Bukhara, and planned visits to a local women,s shelter and the local Business Women,s Association inexplicably cancelled. The Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) has reported continuing difficulty accessing its biological threat reduction and other project sites. Finally, some official USG visitors continue to experience difficulties obtaining visas for travel to Uzbekistan.

2. (S/NF) On Saturday, September 29, First Deputy FM Nematov summoned Ambassador and told him for the third time since arriving at post on September 12 that the Embassy,s meetings with political dissidents and human rights activists were unacceptable. He also complained that Uzbekistan was mentioned by the U.S. Ambassador in Geneva, in a public statement, as a country of concern on human rights. On September 28, Embassy poloff received a phone call from MFA Protocol Office advising that unaccredited staff should refrain from official trips outside Tashkent. On October 3, MFA U.S. Affairs Section Chief informed us that the GOU was jittery in the lead up to elections and that the Embassy should restrain itself, a message subsequently reinforced through COS' host country liaison. Election jitters are a

large part of the reason for stepped-up GOU harassment, but the GOU's current harassment continues the past two years' practice of curtailing Embassy outreach and reporting. While we believe re-engagement with Uzbekistan is in the U.S. national interest, it is clearly not going to happen overnight. End summary.

Shutting down Embassy travel and contact

13. (C) As reported ref B, poloff's visit to a Bukhara school on September 21 was disrupted by a local security official. Ambassador requested a meeting September 27 with First Deputy FM Nematov (ref A), to discuss this incident as well as other topics. Nematov responded that Embassy officers must inform MFA via diplomatic note in advance of their travel and strongly suggested that they should not be meeting with human right activists or other critics of the GOU. He also protested (for the second time) meetings with human rights activists conducted by another emboff earlier that month in the Ferghana Valley.

14. (C) On September 23, USAID personnel (Regional Health and Education Deputy Director and Tuberculosis Specialist) and a PSI International Amcit paid a routine project monitoring visit to the Samarkand Youth Power Center (YPC), a drug demand reduction and HIV/AIDS awareness project. They were met by officials from the Ministry of Justice, who told them that Uzbek law required advance permission for any site visits. The visitors explained that advance notice was normally given for formal events, such as training and seminars but that this was not the practice for routine visits. The MOJ officials filmed this conversation and asked

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for signed statements acknowledging violation of Uzbek procedures. The USAID officials agreed to sign a statement saying they did not know whether the MFA had been informed of the visit. Passports were photocopied and returned. The next day, when the PSI Amcit returned to the site for scheduled meetings, she was told that local participants who had been present the day before had all been called in for interrogation. She reports that the YPC and another NGO participating in the project (Samarkand Business Women's Association) have since been reluctant to contact PSI's Tashkent office.

15. (C) On September 26, the CAO escorted a PAS sponsored Amcit speaker, to Bukhara for two presentations on communications skills, leadership, and small businesses marketing. One event was scheduled at the Women's Crisis Center (a shelter poloff also visited during ref B visit), and the other was to be held with the Business Women's Association. Both events were cancelled at the last minute by the respective hosts. In both cases, the hosts told CAO that they had been informed & by the authorities that the events should not or would not occur. While meeting with a representative of the Ministry of Public Education in Bukhara (arranged by the MFA in Tashkent), CAO expressed her concern about the sudden cancellation. The representative made no substantive response but said she would pass along the message.

16. (C) On September 29, poloff departed Tashkent with visiting SCA/CEN desk officer to Samarkand and Bukhara. MFA Protocol had phoned poloff the evening before, informing him that official meetings post had requested would not be granted and that poloff should not travel until he was accredited. Poloff thanked the protocol officer, explained that he was accompanying our desk officer on a familiarization trip, and departed on his planned trip the next morning. During the trip, poloff and desk officer attempted to visit a USG-funded portal monitor site (access requested via diplomatic note but refused over the telephone by MFA Protocol). Upon reaching the site, they were politely refused entry by border guards, who said they were acting on

instructions from Tashkent.

MFA protests and red tape

17. (C) On September 29 (Saturday), Ambassador was summoned by First Deputy FM Nematov, whose primary complaint was that the U.S. Ambassador in Geneva had reportedly mentioned Uzbekistan among a list of human rights violators. Nematov asked how this could happen, when President Bush had not mentioned Uzbekistan in his UN speech and no Third Committee resolution had been tabled by the United States. Nematov then turned back to the issue of embassy travel) the third time he had raised this with Ambassador in as many weeks. He again protested that embassy meetings with &lowlife8 such as human rights activists were unacceptable and advised that requests by Embassy third and second secretaries to meet with mayors, governors and their deputies were out of order, because of the difference in rank. He also told Ambassador that a diplomatic note had been sent to all foreign embassies in Uzbekistan in 2006 requiring advance notice of travel outside Tashkent. (Note: Post has been unable to locate such a note; we have spoken with several other friendly missions and none of them are aware of such a note, either. Nor can MFA's Americas Desk find a copy. End note.)

18. (C) On October 2, poloff and visiting desk officer met at MFA with Acting Chief of the Department for the USA and American Affairs Tokhir Mamajanov and Chief of the U.S. Affairs Section Ismat Faizullaev. In a cordial exchange (in an otherwise uneventful meeting), Mamajanov discussed the MFA's concern with embassy travel and requests for meetings with senior regional and city officials. Poloff explained that we were trying to be courteous in requesting the meetings but that we would be happy to meet at whatever level

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MFA deemed appropriate. Note: While Nematov has complained several times to Ambassador that embassy officers meet only with riffraff on their travels, the MFA turned down every request made in September, but one, for official meetings outside of Tashkent. We also note that Embassy officers at various ranks have in the distant past had repeated contact with regional and large-city hokims and their deputies. End note.

19. (C) On October 4, Embassy received a diplomatic note dated September 28 referencing our note regarding poloff Tim Buckley's travel on September 29-October 1 to Bukhara and Samarkand. The note advised that poloff should refrain from regional travel while his accreditation is under consideration. (Note: Currently, two new poloffs are awaiting accreditation, while P/E Chief has received word that his accreditation will be issued October 8. All three arrived in the last ten days of August. All Mission Americans have received accreditation recently within 4-6 weeks of arrival - a significant improvement over the past two years, when the GOU refused accreditation to a number of personnel. End note.)

110. (S/NF) One of P/E's two accredited officers met with MFA U.S. Affairs Section Chief Ismat Faizullaev (strictly protect) on October 4. Faizullaev advised, unofficially, that the Embassy should "slow down" until after the December 23 elections and should not push any new initiatives before then. Faizullaev opined that the GOU was nervous about the elections and would be easier to work with afterward. In a somewhat unusual discussion, a National Security Service officer on October 4 told GRPO that Embassy political officers were obtaining distorted views of Uzbekistan by meeting only with people who had axes to grind with the government. GRPO mentioned that we had tried repeatedly to obtain meetings with regional and local officials, most often to no avail, and that we met with anyone we could - that was our job. NSS officer said that if the Embassy were to provide the required notice ten days in advance of travel,

this should not be a problem. NSS officer explained that Uzbek Embassy officers in the United States were subject to similar restrictions, but COS quickly disabused him of the notion. NSS officer's overall message "from NSS Chairman Inoyatov" was that Embassy should abide by MFA rules on travel and contacts.

¶11. (C) Embassy on October 5 received a second diplomatic note, dated October 4, protesting poloff Tim Buckley's September 20-23 travel to Bukhara. We will report text front channel, with comments. It is full of inaccuracies, but the message from MFA is clear: that the GOU (NSS and MOJ, in particular) is scrutinizing travel by Embassy officers, particularly by Pol/Econ officers, and their contact work during the election season.

DTRA project site access difficulties

¶12. (C) Just prior to a September Biological Threat Reduction(BTRP) project team visit, Embassy,s Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) office was informed that requested access to several laboratories in Tashkent, Samargand and a new work site in Qarshi was still pending Uzbek National Security Service (NSS) approval. After post followed up with the project,s Implementing Agent, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, as well as with the Ministries of Health and Agriculture, access was approved but escort by a Ministry of Health official was required. Subsequent travel with the official in company proceeded without incident. Additionally, despite President Karimov,s stated desire to improve relations (ref A), the WMD-PPI project contractor (Washington International Inc.) and its subcontractors still have not been granted access to GOU Ports of Entry where WMD-PPI project equipment has been installed. DTRA Chief and DCM raised access problems with MFA officials Mamajanov and Faizullaev September 28.

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Continued visa difficulties

¶13. (C) Some official USG visitors continue to experience difficulty obtaining visas to come to Uzbekistan. On October 2, the MFA confirmed to us that Barbara Cates (DRL/IRF) would not be issued a visa for her planned October 13-17 visit. According to the MFA, Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom Hanford conducted a successful visit in June, A/S Boucher and DAS Feigenbaum had not mentioned religious freedom in their most recent meetings with senior GOU officials, and there was therefore no need for Cates to visit. Note: Religious Freedom was actually raised by FM Norov during his meetings in New York, and senior USG officials in fact spoke with him at length on the issue. End note. (See also septel.)

¶14. (C) Also in the past two weeks, Moscow-based FAA representative Brian Staurseth and Kazakhstan-based Treasury representative Tim Whelan failed to obtain visas in time for planned travel, despite having submitted diplomatic notes at the Uzbek Embassy in Moscow (where both were at the time working) nearly one month in advance. Staurseth subsequently received his visa, after intervention by the Uzbek Civil Aviation Administration, and is hoping to reschedule for November. On October 4, post learned that an agricultural specialist invited by the GOU and funded through a USAID contract had not been issued a visa in time for her planned travel to Uzbekistan. We are attempting to learn whether the required diplomatic note was properly forwarded to the Uzbek Embassy in Washington. Regardless, these incidents underscore the continuing difficulty of any official travel to Uzbekistan.

Comment: Engagement on whose terms?

¶15. (C) The renewed pressure on Embassy travel comes on the heels of Ambassador's arrival and predates by one week the announcement of a presidential election campaign. Probably a major factor is that the GOU is extra nervous in the run-up to the December 23 presidential election. We believe President Karimov is also trying to lay down a marker in his renewed approaches to the USG) i.e., he is ready to cooperate where interests coincide but will resist our efforts to conduct activities that he perceives to be aimed at regime change (spearheaded, as he sees it, by State Department and USAID civil society programs). Additionally, with the arrival of additional Embassy staff in August and September, we have been able to conduct more trips outside Tashkent than has been the case for some time. That has undoubtedly attracted GOU attention. We note with some interest, though, that the GOU has not objected to travel outside Tashkent by other USG agencies. DATT was twice in the Ferghana Valley in September, and even when DATT met in August with a human rights activist, the GOU remained silent.

¶16. (C) Successful re-engagement with the GOU is in the U.S. national interests. However, this is clearly not going to happen overnight. The current harassment, complemented by residual harassment of local EXBS and ESTH staff, is ugly but expected. Our success will depend largely on identifying the right players and the right levers within the GOU, and even then our leverage may prove insufficient. One complication may be the role of the National Security Service (NSS), whose influence within the GOU's power ministries has grown significantly in the past several years and whose influence within the Presidential Apparatus we believe remains strong. That we do not know where NSS Director Rustam Inoyatov and his senior deputies stand on the question of broad-based re-engagement complicates our task.

¶17. (C) The Embassy has little choice but to abide by the new travel restrictions and notification requirements, including the demand that only accredited officers may perform official

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travel. We will proceed very cautiously on a case by case basis with human rights activists and contacts outside Tashkent. Reports on the GOU's limitations on our activities stand a fair chance of being picked up by media outlets such as RFE/RL and the BBC (Uzbek officials appear indifferent to the damage their restrictions wreak on Uzbekistan's image abroad).

¶18. (C) More generally, we will continue to analyze and report on developments in Uzbekistan using as broad a base of contacts as possible, including those civil society activists still willing to meet with us. While we are concerned about the intimidation of such contacts, we believe we should maintain as broad a base of contacts as is possible. Finally, we will continue to request meetings with appropriate GOU officials on all our trips.
NORLAND